

Bill's Original Story

Note: Manuscript text (36 pages) dictated by William Griffith Wilson, typewritten by Ruth Hock between March and September 1938 in the office of Hank Parkhurst 17 William Street, Newark, New Jersey, submitted to Eugen Exman at Harpers & Brothers Publishing, New York, in early fall 1938 ~~marked text~~ is contained in the manuscript, but crossed out.

When I was about ten years old my father and mother agreed to disagree and I went to live with my grandfather, and grandmother. He was a retired farmer and lumberman. As I see him in retrospect, he was a very remarkable man. After he returned from Civil War he settled in the small Vermont town where I was later to grow up. His original capital consisted of a small, unimproved hillside farm, as sweet and willing helpmeet, and enormous determination to succeed in whatever he attempted. He was a man of high native intelligence, a voracious reader, though little educated in the school sense of the word. There was plenty of financial sense in his make-up and he was a man of real vision. Under other conditions he might well have become master of an industry or railroad empire.

My grandmother brought into the world three children, one of whom was my mother. I can still seem to hear her telling of the struggle of those early days. Such matters as cooking for twenty woodchoppers, looking after the diary, making most of the clothes for the family, long winter rides at twenty below zero to fetch my grandfather home over snowbound roads, seeing him of long before daylight that he and the choppers might have their access thawed out so that work might begin on the mountain top at daylight- this is the thought of tradition upon which they nourished me. They finally achieved their competence and retired late in life to enjoy a well earned rest and the respect and affection of their neighbors. They were the sort of people, I see now, who really made America.

But I had other ideas – much bigger and better ones so I thought. I was to be of the war generation which dissipated the homely virtues, the hard earned savings, the pioneering tradition, and the incredible stamina of your parents grandfather and mine.

I too was ambitious – very ambitious, but very undisciplined. In spite of everyone's effort to correct that condition. I had a genius for evading, postponing or shirking those things which I did not like to do, but when thoroughly interested, everything I had was thrown into the pursuit of my objective. My will to succeed at special undertakings on which my heart were set was very great. There was a persistence, a patience, and a dogged obstinacy, that drove me on. My grandfather used to love to argue with me with the object of convincing me of the impossibility of some venture or another in order to enjoy watching me 'tilt at the windmill' he had erected. One day he said to me – I have just been reading that no one in the world but an Australian can make and throw a boomerang. This spark struck tinder and everything and every activity was instantly laid aside until it could be demonstrated that he was mistaken. The woodbox was not filled, no school work was done, nor could I hardly be persuaded to eat or to go to bed. After a month or more of this thing a boomerang was constructed which I threw around the church steeple. On its return trip it went into transports of joy because it all but decapitated my grandfather who stood near me.

I presently left the country school and fared forth into

the great world I had read about in books. My first journey took me only five miles to an adjoining town where I commenced to attend a seminary well known in our section of the state. Here competition was much more severe and I was challenged on all sides to do the seemingly impossible. There was the matter of athletics and I was soon burning with the ambition to become a great baseball player. This was pretty discouraging to begin with, as I was tall for my age, quite awkward, and not very fast on my feet, but I literally worked at it while others slept or otherwise amused themselves and in my second year became captain of the team, whereupon my interest began to languish, for by that time someone had told me I had no ear for music, which I have since discovered is almost true. Despite obstacles I managed to appear in a few song recitals whereupon my interest in singing disappeared and I got terribly serious about learning to play the violin. This grew into a real obsession and to the consternation of my teachers, grew in the last year and everyone else it became the immediate cause of my failing to graduate. This was my first great catastrophe. By this time I had become President of the class which only made matters worse. As in every thing else I had even very good in certain courses of study which took my fancy, and with others just the opposite, indolence and indifference, being the rule, So it was that the legend of infallibility I had built up around myself collapsed.

In the ensuing summer I was obliged for the first time to really address myself to the distasteful task of repairing my failure. Although my diploma was now in hand, it was by no means clear to my grandparents and parents what they had better next try to do with me. Because of my interest in scientific matters and the liking I had to fussing with gadgets and chemicals, it had been assumed that I was to be an engineer, and my own learnings were towards the electrical branch of the profession. So I went to Boston and took the entrance examination to one of the leading technical schools in this country. For obvious reasons I failed utterly. It was a rather heartbreaking matter for those interested in me and it gave my self-sufficiency another severe deflation.

Finally an entrance was effected at an excellent military college where it was hoped I would really be disciplined. I attended the university for almost three years and would have certainly failed to graduate or come anywhere near qualifying as an engineer, because of my laziness and weakness mathematics. Particularly Calculus, in this subject a great number of formulas have to be learned and the application practiced. I remembered that I absolutely refused to learn any of them or do any of the work whatever until the general principles underlying the subject had been made clear to me. The instructor was very patient, but finally through up his hands in disgust as I began to argue with him and to hint pretty strongly that perhaps he didn't quite understand them himself. So I commenced an investigation of the principles underlying Calculus in the school library and learned something of the conceptions of the great minds of Leibnitz and Newton whose genius had made possible this useful and novel mathematical device. Thus armed I mastered the first problem in the textbook and commenced a fresh controversy with my teacher, who angrily, but quite properly, gave me a zero for the course. Fortunately for my future at the University, I soon enabled to leave the place gracefully, even heroically, for the United States of America had gone to war.

Being students of a military academy school the student boy almost to a man bolted for the first officers training camp at Plattsburgh. Though a bit under age, I received a commission a

second lieutenant and got myself assigned to the heavy artillery. Of this I was secretly ashamed, for when the excitement of the day had subsided and I lay in my bunk, I had to confess I did not want to be killed. This bothered me terribly this suspicion that I might be coward after all. I could not reconcile it with the truly exalted mood of patriotism and idealism which possessed me when I hadn't time to think. It was very very damaging to my pride, though most of this damage was repaired later on when I got under fire and discovered I was just like other people, scared to death, but willing to face the music. After graduating from an army artillery school, I was sent to a post which was situated near a famous old town on the New England coast ones famous for its deep-sea whaling, trading and Yankee seagoing tradition. ~~Here I made two decisions. The first one, and the best, to marry. The second decision was most emphatically the worst I ever mad took up with I made the acquaintance of John Barleycorn and decided that I liked it him. My wife to be~~

Here I set out upon two paths and little did I realize how much they were diverge. In short I got married and at about the same time, took my first drink and decided that I liked it. But for undying loyalty of my wife and her faith through the years, I should not be alive today. She was a city bred person and represented a background and way of life for which I had secretly longed. Her family spent long summers in our little town. All of them were highly regarded by the natives. This was most complimentary for among the countrymen there existed strong and often unreasonable prejudices against city folks. For the most part, I felt differently. Most city people I knew had money, assurance, and what then seemed to me great sophistication. Most of them had family trees. There were servants, fine houses, gay dinners, and all of the other things with which I was wont to associate power and distinction. All of them, quite unconsciously I am sure, could make me feel very inadequate and ill at ease. I began to feel woefully lacking in the matter of poise and polish and worldly knowledge. Though very proud of the traditions of my own people, I sometimes indulged in the envious wish that I had been born under other circumstances and with some of these advantages. Since then immemorial I suppose country boys have thought and felt as I did. These feelings of inferiority are I suspect responsible for the enormous determination many of them have felt to go out to the cities in quest of what seemed to them like true success. Though seldom revealed, these were the sentiments that drove me on from this point. The war fever ran high in the city near my post and I soon discovered that young officers were in great demand at the dinner tables of the first citizens of the place. Social differences were laid aside and everything was done to make us feel comfortable, happy, and heroic. A great many things conspired to make me feel that I was important. I discovered that I had a somewhat unusual power over men on the drill field and in the barracks. I was about to fight to save the world for democracy. People whose station in life I had envied were receiving me as an equal. My marriage with a girl who represented all of the best things the city had to offer, was close at hand, and last, but not least, I had discovered John Barleycorn, Love, adventure, war, applause of the crowd, moments sublime with intervals hilarious - I was a part of life at last, and very happy.

The warnings of my people, the contempt which I had felt for those who drank, were put aside with surprising alacrity as I discovered what the Bronx cocktail could really do for a fellow. My imagination soared -- my tongue loosened at last -

wonderful vistas opened on all sides, but best of all my self consciousness - my gaucheries and my ineptitude disappeared into thin air. I seemed to the life of the party. To the dismay of my bride I used to get pretty drunk when I tried to compete with more experienced drinkers, but I argued, what did it matter, for so did everyone else at sometime before daylight. Then came the day of parting, of a fond leave taking of my brave In wife. Amid that strange atmosphere which was the mixture of sadness, high purpose, the feeling of elation that precedes an adventure of the first magnitude. Thus many of us sailed for 'over there' and none of us knew if we should return. For a time, loneliness possessed me, but my new friend Barleycorn always took care of that. I had, I thought discovered a missing link in the chain of things that make life worth while.

Then we were in dear old England, soon to cross the channel to the great unknown. I stood in Winchester Cathedral the day before crossing hand in hand with head bowed, for something had touched me then I had never felt before. I had been wondering, in a rare moment of sober reflection, what sense there could be to killing and carnage of which I was soon to become an enthusiastic part. Where could the Deity be - could there be such a thing - Where now was the God of the preachers, the thought of which used to make me so uncomfortable when they talked about him. Here I stood on the abyss edge of the abyss into which thousands were falling that very day. A feeling of despair settled down on me - where was He - why did he not come- and suddenly in that moment of darkness, He was there. I felt an all enveloping, comforting, powerful presence. Tears stood in my eyes, and as I looked about, I saw on the faces of others nearby, that they too had glimpsed the great reality. Much moved, I walked out into the Cathedral yard, where I read the following inscription on a tombstone. 'Here lies a Hampshire Grenadier, Who caught his death drinking small good beer - A good soldier is ne'er forgot, whether A he dieth by musket or by pot.' The squadron of bombers swept overhead in the bright sunlight, and I cried to myself 'Here's to adventure' and the feeling of being in the great presence disappeared, never to return for many years. ---- ???

I was twenty two, and a grizzled veteran of foreign wars. I felt a tremendous assurance about my future, for was not I the only officer of my regiment save one, who had received a token of appreciation from the men. This quality of leadership, I fancied, would soon place me at the head of some great commercial organization which I would manage with the same constant skill that the pipe organist does his stops and keys.

The triumphant home coming was short lived. The best that could be done was to secure a bookkeeping job in the insurance department of the one of the large railroads. I proved to be a wretched and rebellious bookkeeper and could not stand criticism, nor was I much reconciled to my salary, which was only half the pay I had received in the army. When I started to work the railroads were under control of the government. As soon as my road was returned to its stockholders, I was promptly let out because I could not compete with the other clerks in my office. I was so angry and humiliated at this reverse that I nearly became a socialist to register my defiance of the powers that be, which was going pretty far for a Vermonter.

To my mortification, my wife went out and got a position which brought in much more than mine had. Being absurdly sensitive, I imagined that her relatives an my newly made city acquaintances were snickering a bit at my predicament.

Unwillingly, I had to admit, that I was not really trained to hold even a mediocre position. Though I said little, the old driving, obstinate determination to show my mettle asserted itself. Somehow, I would show these scoffers. To complete my engineering seemed out of the question, partly because/my distaste for mathematics, My only other assets were my war experiences and a huge amount of ill-assorted reading. The study of law suggested itself, and I commenced a three year night course with enthusiasm. Meanwhile, employment showed up and I became a criminal investigator for a Surety Company, earning almost as much money as my wife, who spiritedly backed the new undertaking. My daytime employment took me about Wall Street and little by little, I became interested in what I saw going on there. I began to wonder why a few seemed to be rich and famous while the rank and file apparently lost money. I began to study economics and business.

Somewhat to the dismay of our friends, we moved to very modest quarters where we could save money. When we had accumulated \$1, 000.00, most of it was placed in utility stocks, which were then cheap and unpopular. In a small way, I began to be successful in speculation. I was intrigued by the romance of business, industrial and financial leaders became my heroes. I read every scrap of financial history I could lay hold of. Here I thought was the road to power. Like the boomerang, episode, I could think of nothing else. How little did I see that I was fashioning a weapon that would one day return and cut me to ribbons.

As so many of my heroes commenced as lawyers, I persisted in the course, thinking it would prove useful. I also read many success books and did a lot of things that Horatio Alger's boy heroes were supposed to have done.

Characteristically enough I nearly failed my law course as I appeared at one of the final examinations too drunk to think or write. My drinking had not become continuous at this time, though occasional embarrassing incidents might have suggested that it was getting real hold. Neither my wife or I had much time for social engagements and in any event we soon became unpopular as I always got tight and boasted disagreeably of my plans and my future.

She was becoming very much concerned and frequently we had long talks about the matter. I waived her objections aside by pointing out that red blooded men almost always drank and that men of genius frequently conceived their vast projects while pleasantly intoxicated, adding for good measure, that the best and most majestic constructions of philosophical thought were probably so derived.

By the time my law studies were finished, I was quite sure I did not want to become a lawyer. I know that somehow I was going to be a part of that then alluring maelstrom which people call Wall Street. How to get into business there was the question. When I proposed going out on the road to investigate properties, my broker friends laughed at me. They did not need such a service and pointed out that I had no experience. I reasoned that I was partly qualified as an engineer and as a lawyer, and that practically speaking I had acquired very valuable experience as a criminal investigator. I felt certain that these assets could not be capitalized. I was sure that people lost money in securities because they did not know enough about managements, properties, markets, and ideas at work in a given situation.

Since no one would hire me and remembering that we now had a few thousand dollars, my wife and I conceived the

hare-brained scheme of going out and doing some of this work at our own expense, so we each gave up our employment and set off in a motorcycle and side car, which was loaded down with a tent, blankets, change of clothes and three huge volumes of a well known financial reference service. Some of our friends thought a lunacy commission should be appointed and I sometimes think they were right. Our first exploit was fantastic. Among other things, we owned two shares of General Electric, then selling at about \$300.00 a share. Everyone thought it was too high, but I stoutly maintained that it would someday sell for five or ten times that figure. So what could be more logical than to proceed to the main office of the company in New York and investigate it. Naive wasn't it? The plan was to interview the officials and get employment there if possible. We drew seventy five dollars from our savings as working capital, vowing never to draw another cent. We arrived at Schenectady, I did talk with some of the people of the to company and became wildly enthusiastic over GE. My attention was drawn to the radio end of the business and by a strange piece of luck, I learned much of what the company thought about its future. I was then able to put a fairly intelligent projection of the coming radio boom on paper, which I sent to one of my brokers in town. To replenish our working capital, my wife and I worked on a farm nearby for two months, she in the kitchen, and I in the haystack. It was the last honest manual work that I did for many years.

The cement industry then caught my fancy and we soon found ourselves looking at a property in the Lehigh district of Eastern Pennsylvania. An unusual speculative situation existed which I went to New York and described to one of my broker friend. This time I drew blood in the shape of an option on hundred shares of stock which promptly commenced to soar. Securing a few hundred dollars advance on this deal, we were freed of the necessity of work, and during the coming year following year, we travelled all over the southeast part of the United States, taking in power projects, an aluminum plant, the Florida boom, the Birmingham steel district, Muscle Shoals, and what not. By this time my friends in New York thought it would pay them to really hire me. At last I had a job in Wall Street. Moreover, I had the use of twenty thousand dollars of their money. For some years the fates tossed horseshoes and golden bricks into my lap and I made much more money than was good for me. It was too easy.

By this time drinking had gotten to take a very important and exhilarating place in my life. What was a few hundred dollars when you considered it in terms of excitement and important talk in the gilded palaces of jazz uptown. My natural conservativeness was swept away and I began to play for heavy stakes. Another legend of infallibility commenced to grow up around me and I began to have what is called in Wall Street a following which amounted to many paper millions of dollars. I had arrived, so let the scoffers scoff and be damned, but of course, they didn't, and I made a host of fair weather friends. I began to reach for more power attempting to force myself onto the directorates of corporations in which I controlled blocks of stock.

By this time, my drinking had assumed serious proportions. The remonstrances of my associates terminated in a bitter row, and I became a lone wolf. Though I managed to avoid serious scrapes and partly out of ~~loyalty~~, extreme drunkenness, I had not become involved with the fair it sex, there were many unhappy scenes in my apartment, which was a large one, as I had hired two, and had gotten the real estate

people to knock out the walls between them.

In the spring of 1929 caught the golf fever. This illness was about the worst yet. I had thought golf was pretty tepid sport, but I noticed some of my pretty important friends thought it was a real game and it presented an excuse for drinking by day as well as by night. Moreover some one had casually said, they didn't think I would play a good game. This was a spark in a powder magazine, so my wife and I were instantly off to the country she to watch while I caught up with Walter Hagen. Then too it was a fine chance to flaunt my money around the old home town. And to carom lightly around the exclusive course, whose select city membership had inspired so much awe in me as a boy. So Wall Street was lightly tossed aside while I acquired drank vast quantities of gin and acquired the impeccable coat of tan, one sees on the faces of the well to do. The local banker watched me with an amused skepticism as I whirled good fat checks in and out of his bank.

IN October 1929 the whirling movement in my bank account ceased abruptly, and I commenced to whirl myself. Then I felt like Stephen Leacock's horseman, it seemed as though I were galloping rapidly in all directions at once, for the great panic was on. First to Montreal, then to New York, to rally my following in stocks sorely needing support. A few bold spirits rushed into the breach, but it was of no use. I shed my own wings as the moth who gets to near to the candle flame. After one of those days of shrieking inferno on the stock exchange floor with no information available, I lurched drunkenly from the hotel bar to an adjoining brokerage office there at about 8 o'clock in the evening I feverishly searched a huge pile of ticker tape and tore of about an inch of it. It bore the inscription P.F.K.32. The stock had opened at 52 that morning. I had controlled over one hundred thousand shares of it, and had a sizable block myself. I knew that I was finished, and so were a lot of my friends. I went back into the bar and after a few drinks, my composure returned. People were beginning to jump from every story of that great Tower of Babel. That was high that I was not so weak. I realized that I had been careless, especially with other peoples money. I had not paid attention to business and I deserved to be hurt. After a few some more whiskey, my confidence returned again, and with it an almost terrifying determination to somehow capitalize this mess and pay everybody off. I reflected that it was just another worthwhile lesson and that there were a lot of reasons why people lost money in Wall Street that I had not thought of before.

My wife took it all like the great person she is. I think she rather welcomed it the situation thinking it might bring me to my senses. Next morning, I woke early, shaking badly from excitement and a terrific hangover. A half bottle of Gin quickly took care of that momentary weakness and I soon as business places were open I called a friend in Montreal and said -"Well Dick, they have nailed my hide to the barn door" - said he "The hell they have, come we on up". That is all he said and up we went.

I shall never forget the kindness and generosity of this friend. Moreover I must still have carried one horseshoe with me, for by the spring of 1930, we were living in our accustomed style and I had a very comfortable credit balance on the very security in which I had taken the heaviest licking, with plenty of Champaign and sound Canadian whiskey, I began to feel like Napoleon returning from Elba. Infallible again. No St. Helena for me. Accustomed as they were to the ravages of fire water in Canada in those days, I soon began to outdistance most of my

countrymen both as a serious and a frivolous drinker.

Then the depression bore down in earnest. ~~and I, having become worse than useless, had to be reluctantly~~ Though I had become manager of one of the departments of my friend's business, my drinking and nonchalant cocksurenness, had rendered me worse than useless, so he reluctantly let me go. We were stony broke again, and even our furniture looked like it was gone, for I could not even pay next months rent on our swank apartment.

We wonder to this day how we ever got out of Montreal. But we did, and then I had to eat humble pie. We went to live with my Father and Mother-in-law where we happily found never failing help and sympathy. I got a job at what seemed to be a mere pittance of one hundred dollars a week, but a brawl with a taxi driver, who got very badly hurt, put an end to that. Mercifully, no one knew it, but I was not to have steady employment for five years, nor was I to draw a sober breath if I could help it.

Great was my humiliation when my poor wife was obliged to go to work in a department store, coming home exhausted night after night to find me drunk again. I became a hanger-on at brokerage shops, but was less and less welcome as my drinking increased. Even then opportunities to make money pursued me, but I passed up the best of them by getting drunk at exactly the wrong time. Liquor had ceased to be a luxury; it had become a necessity. What few dollars I did make were devoted to keeping my credit good at the bars. To keep out of the hands of the police and for reasons of economy, I began to buy bathtub gin, usually two bottles a day, and sometimes three if I did a real workmanlike job. This went on endlessly and I presently began to awake real early in the morning shaking violently. Nothing would seem to stop it but a water tumbler full of raw liquor. If I could steal out of the house and get five or six glasses of beer, I could sometimes eat a little breakfast. Curiously enough I still thought I could control the situation and there were periods of sobriety which would revive the flagging hope of my wife and her parents. But as time wore on matters got worse. My mother-in-law died and my wife's health became poor, as did that of my Father-in-law. The house in which we lived was taken over by the mortgage holder. Still I persisted and still I fancied that fortune would again shine upon me. As late 1932 I engaged the confidence of a man who had friends with money. In the spring and summer of that year we raised one hundred thousand dollars to buy securities at what proved to be an all time low point in the New York stock exchange. I was to participate generously in the profits, and sensed that a great opportunity was at hand. So prodigious bender a few days before the deal was to be closed.

In a measure this did bring me to senses. Many times before I had promised my wife that I had stopped forever. I had written her sweet notes and had inscribed the fly leaves of all the bibles in the house with to that effect. Not that the bible meant so much, but after all it was the book you put your hand on when you were sworn in at court. I now see, however, that I had no sustained desire to stop drinking until this last debacle. It was only then that I realized it must stop and forever. I had come to fully appreciate that once the first drink was taken, there was no control Why then take this one? That was it- never was alcohol to cross my lips again in any form. There was, I thought, absolute finality in this decision. I had been very wrong, I was utterly miserable and almost ruined. This decision brought a great sense of relief, for I knew that I really wanted to stop. It would not be easy, I was sure of that, for I had begun to sense

the power and cunning of my master - John Barleycorn. The old fierce determination to win out settled down on me - nothing, I still thought, could overcome that aroused as it was. Again I dreamed of my wife smiling happily, as I went out to slay the dragon. I would resume my place in the business world and recapture the lost regard of my fiends and associates. It would take a long time, but I could be patient. The picture of myself as a reformed drunkard rising to fresh heights of achievement, quite carried me away with happy enthusiasm. My wife caught the spirit for she saw at last that I really meant business.

But in a short while I came in drunk. I could give no real explanation for it. The thought of my new resolve had scarcely occurred to me as I began. There had been no fight - someone had offered me a drink, and I had taken it, casually, remarking to myself that one or two would not harm a man of my capacity. What had become of my giant determination? How about all of that self searching I had done? Why had not the thought of my past failures and my new ambitions come into my mind? What of the intense desire to make my wife happy? Why hadn't these things - these powerful incentives arisen in my mind to stay my hand as I reached out to take that first drink? Was I crazy? I hated to think so, but I had to admit that a condition of mind resulting in such an appalling lack of perspective came pretty near to being just that.

Then things were better for a time. I was constantly on guard. After two or three weeks of sobriety I began to think I was all right. Presently this quiet confidence was replaced by cocksureness. I would walk past my old haunts with a feeling of elation - I now fully realized the danger that lurked there. The tide had turned at last - and now I was really through. One afternoon on my way home I walked into a bar room to make a telephone call, suddenly I turned to the bartender and said "Four Irish whiskies - water on the side" - As he poured them out with a surprised look, I can only remember thinking to myself - "I shouldn't be doing this, but here's how to the last time". As I gulped down the fourth one, I beat on the bar with my fist and said for "God's sake, why have I done this again?" Where had been my realization of only this morning as I had passed this very place, that I was never going to drink again I could give no answer, mortification and the feeling of utter defeat swept over me. The thought that perhaps I could never stop crushed me. Then as the cheering warmth of these first drinks spread over me, I said - "Next time I shall manage better, but while I am about it, I may as well get good and drunk". And I did exactly that.

I shall never forget the remorse, the horror the utter hopelessness of the next morning. The courage to rise and do battle was simply not there. Before daylight I had stolen out of the house, my brain raced uncontrollably. There was a terrible feeling of impending calamity. feared even to cross a street, less I collapse and be run over by an early morning truck. Was there no bar open? Ah, yes, there was the all night place which sold beer - though it was before the legal opening hour, I persuaded the man behind the food counter that I must have a drink or perhaps die on the spot. Cold as the morning was, I must have drunk a dozen bottles of ale in rapid succession. My writhing nerves were stilled at last and I walked to the next corner and bought a paper. It told me that the stock market had gone to hell again - "What difference did it make anyway, the market would get better, it always did, but I'm in hell to stay - no more rising markets for me. Down for the count - what a blow to one so proud. I might kill myself, but no - not now, " These were some

of my thoughts - then I felt dazed - I groped in a mental fog - mere liquor would fix that - then two more bottles of cheap gin. Oblivion.

The human mind and body is a marvelous mechanism, for mine withstood this sort of thing for yet another two years. There was little money, but I could always drink. Sometimes I stole from my wife's slender purse when the early morning terror of madness was upon me. There were terrible scenes and though not often violent, I would sometimes do such things as to throw a sewing machine, or kick the panels out of every door in the house. There were moments when I swayed weakly before an open window or the medicine chest in which there was poison - and cursed myself for a weakling. There were flights from the city to the country when my wife could bear with me no longer at home. Sometimes there would be several weeks and hope would return, especially for her, as I had not let her know how defeated I really was, but there was always the return to the conditions still worse. Then came a night I when the physical and mental torture was so hellish that I feared I would take a flying leap through my bedroom window sash and all and somehow managed to drag my mattress down to the kitchen floor which was at the ground level. I had stopped drinking a few hours before and hung grimly to my determination that I could have no more that night if it killed me. That very nearly happened, but I was finally rescued by a doctor who prescribed chloral hydrate, a powerful sedative. This relieved me so much that next day found me drinking apparently without the usual penalty, if I took some sedative occasionally. In the early spring of 1934 it became evident to everyone concerned that something had to be done and that very quickly. I was thirty pounds underweight, as I could eat nothing when drinking, which was most of the time. People had begun to fear for my sanity and I frequently had the feeling myself that I was becoming deranged.

With the help of my brother-in-law, who is a physician I was placed in a well known institution for the bodily and mental rehabilitation of alcoholics. It was thought that if I were thoroughly cleared of alcohol and the brain irritation which accompanies it were reduced, I might have a chance. I went to the place desperately hoping and expecting to be cured. The so-called belladonna treatment given in that place helped a great deal. My mind cleared and my appetite returned. Alternate periods of Hydrotherapy, mild exercise and relaxation did wonders for me. Best of all I found a great friend in the doctor who was head of the staff. He went far beyond his routine duty and I shall always be grateful for those long talks in which explained that when I drank I became physically ill and that this bodily condition was usually accompanied by a mental state such that the defense one should have against alcohol became greatly weakened, though in no way mitigating my early foolishness and selfishness about drink, I was greatly relieved to discover that I had really been ill perhaps for several years. Moreover I felt that the understanding and fine physical start I was getting would assure my recovery, Though some of the inmates of the place who had been there many times seemed to smile at that idea. I noticed however that most of them had no intention of quitting; they merely came there to get reconditioned so that they could start in again. I, on the contrary, desperately wanted to stop and strange to say I still felt that I was a person of much more determination and substance than they, so I left there in high hope and for three or four months the goose hung high. In a small way I began to make some progress in business.

Then came the terrible day when I drank again and could not explain why I started. The curve of my declining moral and bodily health fell of like a ski jump. After a hectic period of drinking, I found myself again in... [archivist's note: some lines are missing here]

Everyone became resigned to the certainty that I would have to be confined somewhere or else stumble along to a miserable end, but there was soon to be proof that indeed it is often darkest before dawn, for this proved to be my last drinking bout, and I am supremely confident that my present happy state is to be for all time.

Late one afternoon near the end of that month of November I sat alone in the kitchen of my home. As usual, I was half drunk and enough so that the keen edge of my remorse was blunted. With a certain satisfaction I was thinking that there was enough gin secreted about the house to keep me fairly comfortable that night and the next day. My wife was at work and I resolved not to be in too bad shape when she got home. My mind reverted to the hidden bottles and at I carefully considered where each one was hidden. These things must be firmly in my mind to escape the early morning tragedy of not being able to find at least a water tumbler full of liquor. Just as I was trying to decide whether to risk concealing one of the full ones within easy reach of my side of the bed, the phone rang.

~~At the other end of the line~~ Over the wire came the voice of an old school friend and drinking companion of boom times. By the time we had exchanged greetings, I sensed that he was sober. This seemed strange, for it was years since anyone could remember his coming to New York in that condition. I had come to think of him as another hopeless devotee of Bacchus. Current rumor had it that he had been committed to a state institution for alcoholic insanity. I wondered if perhaps he had not just escaped. Of course he would come over right away and take dinner with us. A fine idea that, for I then would have an excuse to drink openly with him. Yes, we would try to recapture the spirit of other days and perhaps my wife could be persuaded to join in, which in self defense she sometimes would. I did not even think of the harm I might do him. There was to be a pleasant, and I hoped an exciting interlude in what had become a dreary ~~waste~~ round of loneliness. Another drink stirred my fancy; ~~this would be~~ an oasis in the dreary waste. That was it - an oasis. Drinkers are like that.

The door opened and there he stood, very erect and glowing. His deep voice boomed out cheerily - the cast of his features - his eyes - the freshness of his complexion - this was my friend of schooldays. There was a subtle something or other instantly apparent even to my befuddled perception. Yes - there was certainly something more - he was inexplicably different - what had happened to him?

We sat at the table and I pushed a lusty glass of gin flavored with pineapple juice in his direction. I thought if my wife came in, she would be relieved to find that we were not taking it straight ---

"Not now", he said. I was a little crest fallen at this, though I was glad to know that someone could refuse a drink at that moment - I knew I couldn't. "On the wagon?" - I asked. He shook his head and looked at me with an impish grin.

"Aren't you going to have anything?" - I ventured presently.

"Just as much obliged, but not tonight" I was disappointed, but curious. What had got into the fellow - he wasn't himself.

"No, he's not himself - he's somebody is else - not just that either - he was his old self, plus something more, and maybe minus something". I couldn't put my finger on it - his whole bearing almost shouted that something of great import had taken place.

"Come now, what's this all about", I asked. Smilingly, yet seriously, he looked straight at me and said "I've got religion".

So that was it. Last summer an alcoholic crackpot - this fall, washed in the blood of the Lamb. heavens, that might be even worse. I was thunderstruck, and he, of all people. What on earth could one say to the poor fellow.

So I finally blurted out "That's fine", and sat back waiting for a sizzling blast on salvation and the relation of the Cross, the Holy Ghost, and the Devil thereto. Yes, he did have that starry eyed look, the old boy was on fire all right. Well, bless his heart, let him rant. It was nice that he was sober after all. I could stand it anyway, for there was plenty of gin and I took a little comfort that tomorrow's ration wouldn't have to be used up right then.

Old memories of Sunday School - the profit temperance pledge, which I never signed - the sound of the preacher's voice which could be heard on still Sunday mornings way over on the hillside beyond the railroad tracks, - My grandfather's quite scorn of things some church people did to him - his fair minded attitude that I should make up my mind about these things myself - his convictions that the ~~fears~~-spheres really had their music - but his denial of the right of preachers to tell him how he should listen - his perfect lack of fear when he mentioned these things just before his death - these memories surged up out of my childhood as I listened to my friend. My own gorge rose for a moment to an all time high as my anti-preacher - anti-church folk sentiment welled up inside me. These feelings soon gave way to respectful attention as my former drinking companion rattled on. Without knowing it, I stood at the great turning point of my life - I was on the threshold of a fourth dimension of existence that I had doubtfully heard some people describe and others pretend to have.

He went on to lay before me a simple proposal. It was so simple and so little complicated with the theology and dogma I had associated with religion that by degrees I became astonished and delighted. I was astonished because a thing so simple could accomplish the profound result I now beheld in the person of my friend. To say that I was delighted is putting it mildly, for I realized that I could go for his program also. Like all but a few u human beings I had believed in the existence of a power greater than myself. True atheists are really very scarce. It always seemed to me more difficult and illogical to be an atheist than to believe there is a certain amount of law and order and purpose underlying the universe. The faith of an atheist in his convictions is far more blind then that of the religionist for it leads inevitably to the absurd conclusion that the vast and ever changing cosmos originally grew out of a cipher, and now has arrived at its present state through a series of haphazard accidents, one of which is man himself. My liking for things scientific had encouraged to look into such matters as a theory of evolution the nature of matter itself as seen through the eyes of the great chemists physicists and astronomers and I had pondered much on the question of the meaning of life itself. The chemist had shown me that material matter is not all what it appears to be. His studies point to the conclusion that the elements and there myriad combinations are but in the last

analysis nothing but different arrangements of that universal something which they are pleased to call the electron. The physicist and the astronomer had shown me that our universe moves and evolves according to many precise and well understood laws. They tell me to the last second when the sun will be next eclipsed at the place I am now standing, or the very day several decades from now. When Haley's comet will make its turn about the sun. Much to my interest I learned from these men that great cosmic accidents occur bringing about conditions which are not exceptions to the law so much as they result in new and unexpected developments which arise logically enough once the so called accident has occurred. It is highly probable for example-that our earth is the only planet in the solar system upon which man could evolve - and it is claimed by some astronomers that the chance that similar planets exist elsewhere in the universe is rather small. There would have to be a vast number of coincidences to bring about the exact conditions of light, warmth, food supply, etc. to support life as we know it here. But I used to ask myself why regard the earth as an accident, in a system which evidences in so many respects the greatest law and order? If all of this law existed then could there be so much law and no intelligence? And if there was an intelligence great enough to materialize and keep a universe in order it must necessarily have the power to create accidents and make exceptions.

The evolutionist brought great logic to bear on the proposition that life on this planet began with the lowly amoebae, which was a simple cell residing in the oceans of Eons past. Through countless & strange combinations of logic and accident man and all other kinds of life evolved but man possessed a of self, a power to reason and to choose, and a small still voice which told him the difference between right and wrong and man became increasingly able to fashion with his hands and with his tools the creations of his own brain. He could give direction and purpose to natural laws and so he apparently created new things for himself and out of a tissue composed of his past experience and his new ideas. Therefore man though resembling other forms of life in many ways seems to me very different. It was obvious that in a limited fashion he could play at being a God himself.

Such was the picture I had of myself and the world in which I lived, that there was a mighty rhythm, intelligence and purpose behind it all despite inconsistencies. I had rather strongly believed.

But this was as far as I had ever got toward the realization of God and my personal relationship to Him. My thoughts of God were academic and speculative when I had them, which for some years past had not been often. That God was an intelligence power and love upon which I could absolutely rely as an individual had not seriously occurred to me. Of course I knew in a general way what theologians claimed but I could not see that religious persons as a class demonstrated any more power, love and intelligence than those who claimed no special dispensation from God though I granted that Christianity ought to be a wonderful influence I was annoyed, irked and confused by the attitudes they took, the beliefs they held and the things they had done in the name of Christ. People like myself had been burned and whole population put to fire and sword on the pretext they did not believe as Christians did. History taught that Christians were not the only offenders in this respect. It seemed to me that on the whole it made little difference whether you were Mohammedan, Catholic, Jew,

Protestant or Hotentot. You were supposed to look askance at the other fellows approach to God. Nobody could be saved unless they fell in with your ideas. I had a great admiration for Christ as a man, He practiced what he preached and set a marvelous example. It was not hard to agree in Principle with His moral teachings bit like most people, I preferred to live up to some moral standard but not to others. At any rate I thought I understood as well as any one what good morals were and with the exceptions of my drinking I felt superior to most Christians I knew. I might be week in some respects but at least I was not hypocritical, So my interest in Christianity other than its teaching of moral principles and the good I hoped it did on balance was slight.

Sometimes I wished that I had been religiously trained from early childhood that I might have the comfortable assurance about so many things I found it impossible to have any definite convictions upon. The question of the hereafter, the many theological abstractions and seeming contradictions - these things were puzzling and finally annoying for religious people told me I must believe a great many seemingly impossible things to be one of them. This insistence on their part plus a powerful desire to possess the things of this life while there was yet time had crowded the idea of the personal God more and more out of my mind as the years went by. Neither were my convictions strengthened by my own misfortunes. The great war and its aftermath seemed to more certainly demonstrate the omnipotence of the devil than the loving care of an all powerful God

Nevertheless here I was sitting opposite a man who talked about a personal God who told me how he had found Him, who described to me how I might do the same thing and who convinced me utterly that something had come into his life which had accomplished a miracle. The man was transformed ; there was no denying he had been reborn. He was radiant of something which soothed my troubled spirit as though the fresh clean wind of mountain top blowing through and through me I saw and felt and in a great surge of joy I realized that the great presence which had made itself felt to me that war time day in Winchester Cathedral had again returned.

As he continued I commenced to see myself as in as in an unearthly mirror. I saw how ridiculous and futile the whole basis of my life had been. Standing in the middle of the stage of my life's setting I had been feverishly trying to arrange ideas and things and people and even God, to my own liking, to my own ends and to promote what I had thought to be true happiness. It was truly a sudden and breath taking illumination. Then the idea came - " The tragic thing about you is, that you have been playing God." That was it. Playing God. Then the humor of the situation burst upon me, here was I a tiny grain of sand of the infinite shores of Gods great universe and the little grain of sand, had been trying to play God. He really thought he could arrange all of the other little grains about him just to suit himself. And when his little hour was run out, people would weep and say in awed tones-' How wonderful'.

So then came the question - If I were no longer to be God than was I to find and perfect the new relationship with my creator - with the Father of Lights who presides over all ? My friend laid down to me the terms and conditions which were simple but not easy, drastic yet broad and acceptable to honest men everywhere, of whatever faith or lack thereof. He did not tell me that these were the only terms - he merely said that they were terms that had worked in his case. They were spiritual

principles and rules of practice he thought common to all of the worthwhile religions and philosophies of mankind. He regarded them as stepping stones to a better understanding of our relation to the spirit of the universe and as a practical set of directions setting forth how the spirit could work in and through us that we might become spearheads and more effective agents for the promotion of Gods Will for our lives and for our fellows. The great thing about it all was its simplicity and scope, no really religious persons belief would be interfered with no matter what his training. For the man on the street who just wondered about such things, it was a providential approach, for with a small beginning of faith and a very large dose of action along spiritual lines he could be sure to demonstrate the Power and Love of God as a practical workable twenty four hour a day design for living.

This is what my friend suggested I do. One: Turn my face to God as I understand Him and say to Him with earnestness - complete honesty and abandon that I henceforth place my life at His disposal and direction forever. TWO: that I do this in the presence of another person, who should be one in whom I have confidence and if I be a member of a religious organization, then with an appropriate member of that body. TWO: Having taken this first step, I should next prepare myself for Gods Company by taking a thorough and ruthless inventory of my moral defects and derelictions. This I should do without any reference to other people and their real or fancied part in my shortcomings should be rigorously excluded-" Where have I failed-is the prime question. I was to go over my life from the beginning and ascertain in the light of my own present understanding where I had failed as a completely moral person. Above all things in making this appraisal I must be entirely honest with myself. As an aid to thoroughness and as something to look at when I got through I might use pencil and paper. First take the question of honesty. Where, how and with whom had I ever been dishonest? With respect to anything. What attitudes and actions did I still have which were not completely honest with God with myself or with the other fellow. I was warned that no one can say that he is a completely honest person. That would be superhuman and people aren't that way. Nor should I be misled by the thought of how honest I am in some particulars. I was too ruthlessly tear out of the past all of my dishonesty and list them in writing. Next I was to explore another area somewhat related to the first and commonly a very defective one in most people. I was to examine my sex conduct since infancy and rigorously compare it with what I thought that conduct should have been. My friend explained to me that peoples ideas throughout the world on what constitutes perfect sex conduct vary greatly Consequently, I was not to measure my defects in this particular by adopting any standard of easy virtue as a measuring stick, I was merely to ask God to show me the difference between right and wrong in this regard and ask for help and strength and honesty in cataloguing my defects according to the true dictates of my own conscience. Then I might take up the related questions of greed and selfishness and thoughtlessness. How far and in what connection had I strayed and was I straying in these particulars? I was assured I could make a good long list if I got honest enough and vigorous enough. Then there was the question of real love for all of my fellows including my family, my friends and my enemies Had I been completely loving toward all of these at all times and places. If not, down in the book it must go and of course everyone could put plenty down along that line. (Resentments,

self pity, fear, pride.)

My friend pointed out that resentment, self-pity, fear, inferiority, pride and egotism, were attitudes which distorted ones perspective and usefulness to entertain such sentiments and attitudes was to shut oneself off from God and people about us. Therefor it would be necessary for me to examine myself critically in this respect and write down my conclusions.

Step number three required that I carefully go over my personal inventory and definitely arrive at the conclusion that I was now willing to rid myself of all these defects moreover I was to understand that this would not be accomplished by myself alone, therefore I was to humbly ask God that he take these handicaps away. To make sure that I had become really honest in this desire, I should sit down with whatever person I chose and reveal to him without any reservations whatever the result of my self appraisal. From this point out I was to stop living alone in every particular. Thus was I to keep myself free in the future of those things which shut out God's power, It was explained that I had been standing in my own light, my spiritual interior had been like a room darkened by very dirty windows and this was an undertaking to wipe them off and keep them clean. Thus was my housekeeping to be accomplished, it would be difficult to be really honest with myself and God and perhaps to be completely honest with another person by telling an other the truth, I could however be absolutely sure that my self searching had been honest and effective. Moreover I would be taking my first spiritual step towards my fellows for something I might say could be helpful in leading the person to whom I talked a better understanding of himself. In this fashion I would commence to break down the barriers which my many forms of self will had erected. Warning was given me that I should select a person who would be in ho way injured or offended by what I had to say, for I could not expect to commence my spiritual growth at the w expense of another. My friend told me that this step was complete, I would surely feel a tremendous sense of relieve accompanying by the absolute conviction that I was on the right road at last.

Step number four demanded that I frankly admit that my deviations from right thought and action had injured other people therefore I must set about undoing the damage to the best of my ability. It would be advisable to make a list of all the persons I had hurt or with whom I had bad relations. People I disliked and those who had injured me should have preferred attention, provided I had done them injury or still entertained any feeling of resentment towards them. Under no circumstances was I to consider their defects or wrong doing, then I was to approach these people telling them I had commenced a way of life which required that I be on friendly and helpful terms with every body; that I recognized I had been at fault in this particular that I was sorry for what I had done or said and had come to set matters right insofar as I possibly could. Under no circumstances was I to engage in argument or controversy. My own wrong doing was to be admitted and set right and that was all. Assurance was to be given that I was prepared to go to any length to do the right thing. Again I was warned that obviously I could not make amends at the expense of other people, that judgment and discretion should be used lest others should be hurt. This sort of situation could be postponed until such conditions became such that the job could be done without harm to anyone. One could be contented in the meanwhile by discussing such a matter frankly with a third party who would not be involved and of course on a strictly

confidential basis. Great care was to be taken that one not avoid situations difficult or dangerous to oneself on such a pretext. The willingness to go to the limit as fast as possible had to be at all times present. This principle of making amends was to be continued in the future for only by keeping myself free of bad relationships with others could I expect to receive the Power and direction so indispensable to my new and larger usefulness. This sort of discipline would help me to see others as they really are; to recognize that every one is plagued by various of self will; that every one is in a sense actually sick with some form of self; that when men behave badly they are only displaying symptoms of spiritual ill health.

One is not usually angry or critical of another when he suffers from some grave bodily illness and I would how presently see senseless and futile it is to be disturbed by those burdened by their own wrong thinking. I was to entertain towards everyone a quite new feeling of tolerance patience and helpfulness I would recognize more and more that when I became critical or resentful I must at all costs realize that such things were very wrong in me and that in some form or other I still had the very defects of which I complained in others. Much emphasis was placed on the development of this of mind toward others. No stone should be left unturned to achieve this end. The constant practice of this principle frequently asking God for His help in making it work under trying circumstances was absolutely imperative. The drunkard especially had to be most rigorous on this point for one burst of anger or self pity might so shut him out from his new found strength that he would drink again and with us that always means calamity and sometimes death.

This was indeed a program, the thought of some of the things I would have to admit about myself to other people was most distasteful - even appalling. It was only so plain that I had been ruined by my own colossal egotism and selfishness, not only in respect to drinking but with regard to everything else. Drinking had been a symptom of these things. Alcohol had submerged my inferiorities and puffed up my self esteem, body had finally rebelled and I had some fatally affected, my thinking and action was woefully distorted through infection from the mire of self pity, resentment, fear and remorse in which I now wallowed. The motive behind a certain amount of generosity, kindness and the meticulous honesty in some directions upon which I had prided myself was not perhaps not so good after all. The motive had been to get personal satisfaction for myself, perhaps not entirely but on the whole this was true. I had sought the glow which comes with the applause praise rendered me by others.

I began to see how actions good in themselves might avail little because of wrong motive, I had been like the man who feels that all is well after he has condescendingly taken turkeys to the poor at Xmas time. How clear it suddenly became that all of my thought and action, both good and bad, had arisen out of a desire to make myself happy and satisfied. I had been self centered instead of God centered. It was now easy to understand why the taking of a simple childlike attitude toward God plus this drastic program of action which ~~would place him~~ would bring results. How evident it became that mere faith in God was not enough. Faith had to be demonstrated by works and there could be no works or any worth while demonstrations until I had fitted myself for the undertaking and had become a suitable table agent through which God might express Himself. There had to be a tremendous personal housecleaning, a

sweeping away of the debris of past willfulness, a restoring of broken relationships and a firm resolve to make God's will my will. I must stop forcing things, I must stop trying to mold people and situations to my own liking. Nearly every one is taught that human willpower and ambition if good ends are sought are desirable attributes. I too had clung to that conception but I saw that it was not good enough, nor big enough, nor powerful enough. My own will had failed in many areas of my life. With respect to alcohol it had become absolutely inoperative. My ambitions, which had seemed worthy at some time, had been frustrated. Even had I been successful, the pursuit of my desires would have perhaps harmed others add their realization would have added little or nothing to anyone's peace, happiness or usefulness. I began to see that the clashing ambitions and designs of even those who sought what to them seemed worthy ends, have filled the world with discord and misery. Perhaps people of this sort created more havoc than those confessedly immoral and crooked I saw even the most useful people die unhappy and defeated. All because some one else had behaved badly or they had

[archivist's note: rest of the manuscript is currently missing]